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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000401

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SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT FORMATION UPDATE: SHIA COALITION
MEMBERS DIVIDE ON PM, CAUTIOUS ON NEW NATIONAL COUNCIL

Classified By: POL COUNS ROBERT S. FORD, FOR REASONS 1.4 (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: In separate February 8 conversations with PolOffs, two Shia Islamist Coalition (List 555) members expressed opposition to the proposed National Security Council. One of them, independent Taha Dera' al-Saadi, said that the entity would be anti-constitutional and could undermine the Council of Representatives. Deputy FM Al-Bayati (SCIRI) told PolOff that Jafari has privately indicated a readiness to give up the PM race in exchange for leadership of Shia Coalition and the Dawa party's ability to select the Minister of Interior. Al-Bayati said that SCIRI has no objections to Dawa's Jawad al-Maliki becoming Minister of Interior and admitted that SCIRI Bayan Jabr encountered problems in his reign as Interior Minister because he was inexperienced and a weak administrator. Bayati's remarks are interesting because they give a sense (a) of SCIRI optimism that we hear elsewhere and (b) the possible trade-off for Jafari finally to concede. We stress, however, that most of our Shia contacts are careful not to try to call the prime minister race yet. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Shia Alliance Independent Taha Dera' al-Saadi (number one on the List 555 Diyala list) told PolOffs February 8 that he was against the proposed National Security Council because it is anti-constitutional and lessens the Council of Representatives' authority. "This is not the type of government that the Iraqis voted for," stated al-Saadi. (Many of our Shia Alliance contacts have told us that the National Security Council should only be an advisory council.) He added it is a positive statement that the Coalition has four candidates to offer the Iraqi people. Al-Saadi did not expect voting for PM would be divisive since the decision to use this method would have been reached democratically. He indicated that if the leadership of the seven factions of the Shia Islamist Coalition reach consensus before February 11, a vote will not be necessary.

13. (C) Current TNA and Shia Alliance Dawa member Mu'ayid al-Ubaydi echoed similar sentiments on the proposed National Security Council. As for the Prime Minister race, al-Ubaydi said the majority of the Shia Coalition prefer PM Jafari, adding that Jafari has the support of Dawa, Dawa Tanzim, the Sadrists, and the majority of the independents. He cited Jafari's many positive attributes, including his ability to solve crises and his "administrative experience". (Note: Al-Ubaydi was not elected to the Council of Representatives (CoR) - he was number 50 on the Baghdad list. He claimed that he will be the first Dawa member to be appointed to the Council of

Representative when any current Dawa CoR member is appointed minister. End Note.)

¶4. (C) In contrast to the Da'wa member, SCIRI official and Deputy Foreign Minister Hamid al-Bayati told PolOff February 8 that PM Jafari told Abdul Aziz al-Hakim that he is willing to give up the PM race in exchange for heading the Shia Alliance and for Dawa's getting to fill the Interior Minister post. Al-Bayati stated that SCIRI has no objections to Dawa's Jawad al-Maliki becoming Minister of Interior. (Bayati admitted that SCIRI's Bayan Jabr encountered problems in his reign as Interior Minister because he was inexperienced and a weak administrator.) Al-Bayati added that the Alliance has no objections to Sa'adun Dulaymi continuing as Minister of Defense. He said that the Fadhila Party will no longer have control of the Ministry of Oil. "There is even a place for Ahmed Chalabi, if he performs well on the oil crisis," al-Bayati said.

¶5. (C) Al-Bayati said that he supported having a unity government as long as the make-up reflects the election results (meaning the Shia Coalition gets about half the major government jobs). He envisioned that the proposed National Security Council could include experienced leaders who are no longer part of this elected government. He confirmed that the Coalition's political committee is hotly debating whether the National Security Council should have any authority. In his opinion, it should not have either legislative or executive powers, especially if it that would require a constitutional amendment. He warned that the majority of the Alliance would reject the Salah ad-Din agreement if there is a push for a

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National Security Council with executive authority.

¶6. (C) Comment: Bayati's remarks are interesting because they give a sense (a) of SCIRI optimism that we hear elsewhere and (b) the possible trade-off for Jafari finally to concede. We stress, however, that most of our Shia contacts are careful not to try to call the prime minister race yet. End Comment.

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